CoreCivic is a benefit to the Leavenworth community

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Body

Perhaps no American city better understands the dedication it takes to operate secure facilities for the benefit of public safety than Leavenworth. It's one of the reasons CoreCivic has been proud to be part of this community for more than 30 years. It's also why we want to ensure the community hears directly from us about the opportunity we have to serve the federal government at the Midwest Regional Reception Center (MRRC).

Let's start with safety. That's job one. Concerns have been raised about the security of the facility when we cared for individuals on behalf of the U.S. Marshals Service. That partnership began in 1992, and while we're proud of the operational track record we've built, there were challenges as that contract neared expiration in 2021. As Leavenworth Chief of Police Pat Kitchens noted, the issues were concentrated in about an 18-month period over that 30-year relationship.

As with any difficult situation, we sought to learn from it. Staffing was the main contributor to the challenges, and the COVID-19 pandemic compounded the labor issues. We're grateful for a more stable labor market now, and we've had a positive response from jobs seekers interested in one of the 300 positions the facility will create. We're also working to make MRRC an attractive option with a starting salary of $28.25/hour, along with competitive benefits like health coverage, retirement benefits and even tuition assistance.

Additionally, we're in ongoing discussions and have committed to enter a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the police department to address its concerns related to facility access and improved communications. We also continue to stress the commitment from both U.S Immigration and Customs Enforcement and CoreCivic that any individuals ordered released by the courts will not be released into the Leavenworth community.

Then there's the matter of permitting. Our facility – which has been here since 1992 – is and always has been properly zoned. Leavenworth's city code designates our site as an existing special use and lawful conforming use. While the city recently passed a resolution saying we need permission to open the facility, there's nothing in Leavenworth's code that allows for such a resolution to rescind zoning.

At the same time, we want to reiterate our strong desire to work in close partnership with Leavenworth and its leaders. As we've shared for several months, we are committed to paying a one-time impact fee of $1 million, a $250,000 annual impact fee and an additional $150,000 annual impact fee to the police department. This is in addition to the over $1 million in annual property taxes CoreCivic already pays.

We've worked to both listen to and be transparent with the community. We've hosted open houses for local leaders and the media, and we've continued to propose solutions to city officials for how we might move forward together.

We believe the opportunity at MRRC offers many benefits to Leavenworth when you understand the facts. Unfortunately, some who aren't part of this community have made that difficult, risking local jobs and expending taxpayer money in the process. Leavenworth citizens should reject this intrusion, work with CoreCivic to continue to benefit the community and encourage their elected leaders to do the same.

Steve Owen is the vice president of communications at CoreCivic.

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